

Bishop Auckland Area Visitor Accommodation Development Strategy 2018

Executive Summary

Prepared for Durham County Council and Visit County Durham by Hotel Solutions.

The Purpose of the Strategy

To provide a robust, evidence-based assessment of the potential for the future development of visitor accommodation in the Bishop Auckland area, to form the basis for Durham County Council and Visit County Durham intervention to encourage, support and accelerate accommodation development in order to fully capitalise on the opportunities for growth in staying tourism that are presented by The Auckland Project, the planned future development of the Kynren day attraction, and the regeneration of Bishop Auckland Town Centre.

The Basis of the Strategy

The report was formulated on the basis of a robust programme of research that has included;

- A review of the 2012 County Durham Visitor Accommodation Futures report;
- An audit of the current visitor accommodation supply in the Bishop Auckland area, and past and current visitor accommodation proposals;
- A face-to-face survey of Bishop Auckland hotel managers;
- A telephone survey of smaller accommodation businesses – guest houses, B&Bs, inns, self-catering accommodation and touring caravan and camping sites;
- consultations with relevant officers of the County Council, Visit County Durham, The Auckland Project and Eleven Arches (Kynren);
- A review of the background studies and consultancy reports that have been prepared for The Auckland Project and the Bishop Auckland Town Centre Masterplan;
- Discussions with hotel and inn operators to gauge their potential interest in opening new accommodation businesses in Bishop Auckland.

Visitor Accommodation Development Opportunities

It is evident from the research that the development of Bishop Auckland as a visitor destination, through The Auckland Project, the regeneration of the town centre, and the development of the Kynren day attraction, is going to generate a significant additional requirement for visitor accommodation in the Bishop Auckland area.

On the basis of the projected visitor numbers reported for Kynren and The Auckland Project it is estimated that there is a potential requirement for an additional 840-3,000 bedspaces in a wide range of different types of visitor accommodation.

The audience research for The Auckland Project shows potential demand for overnight stays from all socio-economic and age groups, suggesting that visitors to Bishop Auckland and Auckland Castle will be looking for a wide range of different types of places to stay, of varying standards, and at different price points.

The Kynren day attraction will have strong appeal for the family market, generating opportunities for a range of family-friendly accommodation options. The Kynren day

attraction will operate on a seasonal basis between April and October, giving rise to a need for seasonal accommodation to cater for the peaks in demand that it will create.

In line with further opportunities identified in the Durham Tourism Management Plan, there could also be opportunities for accommodation geared to the needs of walkers, cyclists and other outdoor activity participants, and accommodation that capitalises on the county's growing reputation for quality food and drink.

The report suggests there may be opportunities to capitalise on the strong and growing demand for holiday lodge and caravan holiday home ownership in County Durham, in terms of the development of holiday lodge parks, holiday resorts and holiday parks.

The research identified over 30 accommodation development proposals that are in line with these requirements in terms of:

- The Auckland Project's planned boutique hotel;
- The upgrading of the Park Head Hotel and Manor House Hotel;
- The upgrading and expansion of some guest houses and B&Bs;
- A proposed inn development;
- The increasing supply of private rooms and entire homes available through airbnb;
- The opening of further holiday cottages;
- A number of small holiday lodge development proposals;
- The improvement and expansion of touring caravan sites;
- Some camping pod developments;
- The significant expansion of the Witton Castle Country Park holiday park.

While these proposals, if progressed, will go some way to meeting the requirements for additional accommodation provision in the Bishop Auckland area, they will not meet all of the requirement that is anticipated if the visitor number projections for the Kynren day attraction and The Auckland Project are achieved.

Further new visitor accommodation will also be needed. Key opportunities that should be encouraged and would be welcomed are:

- High quality and boutique inns, restaurants with rooms and B&Bs to provide a wider choice of serviced accommodation with a good food and drink offer;
- Further hotel provision in Bishop Auckland, most likely in terms of the expansion of existing hotels.
- Luxury holiday cottage complexes with leisure facilities;
- Additional accessible accommodation, including accessible serviced accommodation and some Access Exceptional wheelchair accessible self-catering;
- Holiday lodge parks or eco lodge parks offering holiday lodges for ownership or rental and central leisure and catering facilities;
- Additional touring caravan sites, including potentially luxury touring caravan resorts;
- Motorhome stopovers in Bishop Auckland, some of the villages, or at some of the area's pubs;
- Additional provision for camping, including luxury campsites and eco camping;
- More glamping sites;
- Pop-up glamping hotels to cater for the seasonal peak in demand;
- Bunkhouse and hostel accommodation, including boutique and luxury provision, to cater for walking, cycling and outdoor activity groups, and perhaps educational groups in Bishop Auckland.